

*James R. Schlesinger*

# Cut U.S. Forces in Europe—Now

*From a statement the writer—a former secretary of defense, CIA director and energy secretary—made on Tuesday before the Senate Committee on Armed Services.*

International politics has already passed through an historic watershed. Change continues; indeed, it may well become more dramatic in the period ahead. By the changes he has initiated, Mikhail Gorbachev—for it is primarily he—has altered the world order as we have known it since 1945. He has unleashed forces that he cannot control and did not anticipate. From the standpoint of the Soviet Union, he has opened up a Pandora's Box, and the elements released cannot again be contained. The lines of forces that have governed international relations in the postwar period have now been permanently altered. To proceed as if transformation had not occurred would ultimately be self-defeating.

Let us be clear about what we have accomplished. America has fulfilled its historic responsibility. We have been steadfast. We have helped preserve the democracies of Western Europe during difficult times—and have helped create the new, flourishing Western Europe of today. For 40 years we have stood the watch. We have won. I say this not in a spirit of gloating but as an historic fact. Indeed, one cannot fail to respect a Soviet Union, which from a far weaker economic and political base, was prepared, in the name of its own ideology, to sustain this challenge to the United States and much of the free world for so long a time. Yet, while we should be magnanimous in victory, we should not fail to celebrate this American accomplishment. Were Winston Churchill alive today, I believe he would refer to the steadfast American role of these past 40 years as—our finest hour.

However, Mr. Chairman, as a country we must move on. We must recognize that the international environment has now been transformed. We must not go on doing what we have done in the past on the premise, why change a successful strategy? Were we to do so, it would prove self-defeating. We would damage our international standing and lose the respect of our rivals, the support of our allies and the confidence of the American public. Thus, quite properly, the rationale for our European deployments is up for review and debate.

The military balance has been radically altered. How long the Warsaw Pact may survive as a political association is an open question, but its role as a military alliance and a military threat has been largely broken. The modest reduction in Soviet military deployments has been dwarfed by the essential departure of her Warsaw Pact partners as military allies. Under these circumstances one cannot conceive of a Warsaw Pact offensive save as an act of supreme folly.

American deployments in Europe over the years have been justified as a symbol of the American commitment and, since the '70s, as part of a stalwart conventional capability intended to help deter Soviet or Warsaw Pact attack. Mr. Chairman, that role for the American forces has now been superseded. The new (and substantially reduced) role for those forces is to provide negotiating leverage—to help assure the substantial drawdown of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe. In the present context, however, arms control negotiations raise as many questions as they

answer. Events have now begun to outrun the relatively slow pace of negotiations.

I pointed out earlier that Mr. Gorbachev has unleashed forces that can no longer be controlled—and which portend further dramatic change. Among those forces are the changes in government and the process of democratization in Eastern Europe. Already both Hungary and Czechoslovakia have requested the Soviet Union to remove its troops from their territories. In East Germany popular ferment has forced what is now an interim government to move the prospective date for elections forward from May to March. Once a democratically elected government is in place, a request to the Soviets to reduce and ultimately withdraw Soviet forces is more or less foreordained. In brief, the process of political change has already imposed severe pressure on the Soviet Union to reduce, and perhaps ultimately eliminate, her forces in Eastern Europe. Given its altered international stance and its domestic goals the Soviets will find these pressures hard to resist. Indeed, Soviet leaders have themselves spoken of withdrawing all their forces from Eastern Europe by the year 2000.

Thus, a process is already underway, more or less spontaneously, massively to reduce Soviet forces. It would be ironical and perhaps detrimental, if that process were to be slowed by lengthy negotiations. It would be worse than ironical if the CFE negotiations were to result in legitimatizing the long-term presence of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe that might otherwise be withdrawn in the absence of such negotiations and such legitimatizing. It would be far worse if the nations of Eastern Europe were to hold the United States or NATO responsible for the continued presence in their countries of Soviet forces. In brief, standing firm while negotiations continue may bring a less than optimal outcome.

I am a long time Atlanticist. Over the years, former colleagues have called for a downsizing of U.S. forces. Rightly or wrongly, I have always resisted. Nonetheless, in view of the altered strategic landscape, we should plan radically to scale back our forces in Europe. The time is now. Implementa-

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tion may extend over months or years, as circumstances warrant. But the reduction should not be precluded by the ongoing negotiations in Vienna.

Mr. Chairman, over the years this committee has heard much about burden-sharing. As long as the Warsaw Pact threat remained substantial, I thought much of the comment overblown. Now, however, Belgium has announced the withdrawal of its forces from Germany. The Germans themselves have indicated an intended reduction of the Bundeswehr by roughly 20 percent. Other European countries are preparing to reduce both forces and spending.

Mr. Chairman, as long as a sizable Warsaw Pact threat existed, a major American deployment was vital to European security. But as that threat is reduced, the United States should not be in the position of increasing its share in European security. The time has come, more or less, for Europe to move toward the condition stated by former [West German] Chancellor Helmut Schmidt—Europe should be defended (primarily) by French and German forces.

As we move toward German reunification, as almost inevitably we must, as the Soviet forces in Eastern Europe are drawn down and the threat to Western Europe recedes, we shall find that the eagerness and the welcome for American forces in Europe dwindle. The stationing of so large a set of foreign forces on German soil has become a growing irritant to the German public. We have been obliged to curtail low-level flying, night training and so on. Imagine what will occur when the perception of the Soviet threat, already much reduced, recedes further.

We should begin now to discuss the character of a residual force that is *desired* by our European partners. That force can be a symbol of the abiding American commitment, insurance against the international environment (despite all present prospects) turning darker again and a logistical base for the return of U.S. forces if that should prove necessary. Such a residual force, after the scaling down of the Soviet presence, would be but a fraction of our present deployment.

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At the 40th anniversary summit of NATO in June, President Bush put forth a proposal for the reduction of conventional forces, then specifying a 10 percent manpower U.S. reduction. It was a prudent and productive proposal, but in my judgment time has now overtaken it. Since June a lot of water has flowed over the dam. Changes in Eastern Europe have made untenable the continued stationing of Soviet forces at anything like their present level. In formulating policy now we need to take these changes into account. We have other needs for our defense dollar. Given the budgetary pressures that we all understand, it would be unwise to shortchange other, longer-term requirements for defense spending just to preserve for somewhat longer a NATO force, the role of which has both been sharply altered and diminished, and the size of which is transitory.

The Soviet empire and the Soviet threat are receding. To be sure, there are uncertainties. But the outcome of these uncertainties will not lead to the reimposition of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe—nor the restoration of the classic threat that has concerned us since the Berlin blockade. All the king's horses and all the king's men cannot put that particular Humpty Dumpty together again.